Distribution of wheat and rice free of cost

*22. SHRI D. RAJA:††
SHRI K. E. ISMAIL:

Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government plans to implement the promise made by the Congress Party in its Poll Manifesto that BPL families will be provided 25 kg of wheat or rice at Rs. 3 per kg in a month;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) what would be the subsidy factor while implementing the scheme;

(d) whether Government is aware that there are some areas in the country where people have no purchasing power to purchase wheat or rice even at Rs. 3 per kg; and

(e) if so, whether Government has plan to distribute rice or wheat free of cost to such people till they are provided jobs?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) to (e) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) to (e) As announced in President's address to Parliament on 4th June, 2009. Government proposed to enact the National Food Security Act.

In order to frame the proposed law, Government has initiated necessary action. Examination of different aspects of the proposed law in consultation with State Governments, various Central Ministries, experts and other stake holders in presently in progress.

Food subsidy provided by Government under TPDS is the difference between economic cost of food grains to FCI and the central issue prices charged from ration card holders. The economic cost depends upon Minimum Support Price, local taxes, other incidentals, cost of storage and transportation. The total subsidy payable would also depend upon the scale of issue and numbers of beneficiaries at any point of time.

There are 6.52 crore Below Poverty Line (BPL) (including the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) families in the country on the basis of 1993-94 poverty estimates of the Planning Commission projected on the population estimates of Registrar General of India as on 1.3.2000. At present allocations of 277 lakh tons of foodgrains under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) are made for these 6.52 crore families and 7.4 lakh families in KBK districts of Orissa @ 35 kg. per family per month. At present cost and at present scale of issue, the subsidy on account of these beneficiaries work out to approximately Rs. 370.10 crore per annum.

---

††The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by D. Raja.

For the BPL families with low purchasing power covered under TPDS, food grains are already distributed at highly subsidized prices. For the poorest of such families, *i.e.* 2.43 crore Antyodaya Anna Yojana families, wheat is distributed @ Rs. 2/- and rice @ Rs. 3/- per kg. since December, 2000.

Further, under the Annapurna Scheme, indigent senior citizens of 65 years of age or above not getting the old age pension are supplied foodgrains free of cost @ 10 kg. per person per month.

SHRI D. RAJA: Sir, recently, the Food and Agricultural Organisation has come out with a very alarming report on the problem of hunger in the world. It includes India also. Even after 60 years of Independence, the chronic poverty and hunger continue to be the major challenges before the country and food for the poor must be the primary concern of any Government of the day. That is why, Sir, we have been demanding that the Public Distribution System should be strengthened and universalised. Sir, there are several schemes under which subsidised food is provided to the poor. There are several State Governments, maybe 7, 8 State Governments, which are implementing the Public Distribution System fairly effectively. They have their own schemes to provide food for the poor. My question is whether the proposed food for poor or the Food Security law will be the one which intends to abolish all the existing schemes or it will be a supplementary to the existing schemes. For instance, the existing Antyodya Ann Yojana provides wheat at Rs.2/- per kg., which is lower than the price envisaged in the Food Security law. Sir, my question is: what is the whole idea of the Food Security law? Is it a new law which is going to abolish all the other existing schemes? Is it going to overlap all the State Government schemes which are already providing food for the poor at a lower rate, for example, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra..

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please put the question. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA: Tamil Nadu also. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: No discussions. Please put the question.

SHRI D. RAJA: I have mentioned it. I have mentioned Jharkhand, West Bengal and Kerala. Sir, my question is whether this law is going to abolish all other schemes or it will be a supplement to the existing schemes.

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the hon. Member is recollecting the Presidential Address which we heard. In fact, there was a paragraph. The Government proposed to enact a new law, that is, the National Food Security Act, that will provide a statutory basis for the framework which would ensure food security for all and every BPL family in rural areas as well as in urban areas will be entitled by law to 25 kg of rice or wheat per month at Rs.3/- per kg. That was the announcement which the President of India had made on that particular day. Now, we

are in the process of preparing that Bill. There are number of suggestions but what the hon. Member has said is correct. For instance, as per the announcement which was made by the hon. President, BPL families will get rice and wheat at Rs.3/- per kg. But there are about 2,52,000,00 card holders who come under AAY. As on today, they are, actually, getting rice and wheat at Rs.2/- per kg. and they are getting not 25 kg but 35 kg. So, that issue is very much there. The point raised by the hon. Member is important. We have to give serious thought about that. We have held certain meetings. We are discussing with various State Governments. The first consultation meeting of all the State Secretaries was held, I think, on 10th June, 2009. The second meeting in which there were representatives of Ministry of Rural Development, the Ministry of Human Resource Development and Planning Commission was held on 11th June. We had also invited some experts in this area and that meeting was held on 12th June, 2009. The next round of discussion with the representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Rural Development, the Ministry of Water Resources, the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation and Planning Commission was held on 1st of July. So, we are discussing with various cross-sections and we are in the process of preparation of this Bill. Our thinking is to prepare a draft, keep it available on the Internet, get reaction from public and various organisations, including NGOs, take corrective actions and then come before Parliament.

Sir, there are certain issues which have been raised here. For instance, there are certain schemes, particularly, for the aged population of this country, the senior citizens; and nobody is in a position to look after them. In fact, up to 10 kilo, we are providing free foodgrains to them. So, as per this new law, we have to see how we will be able to protect the interest of that section. There are a number of other schemes which are already existing. So, we have to see how we will be able to continue. Then a comprehensive approach will be taken. This is a very bold decision which the Government of India wants to take. The Government of India also wants to protect the vulnerable section from hunger and that is the reason why we are in the process of taking a very bold decision.

SHRI D. RAJA: Sir, my second supplementary is this. The Government talks about 'inclusive growth'. But, Sir, what the Planning Commission does is very opposite. The Planning Commission's criteria of 'BPL' really exclude vast sections of the poor people from the food security coverage, from any social security coverage. I want to know whether this Government will redefine, re-work on the BPL criteria. It is because when we talk of Public Distribution System, we always wanted to be universal, and, here as a particular issue, this BPL criterion, which is there today, does exclude vast sections of the poor people from this coverage. Sir,

there is Tendulkar Committee appointed by the Ministry of Rural Development. There is Planning Commission. Both are having different views, different perceptions on this entire issue of BPL. So, I want to know whether the Government is ready to redefine the BPL criteria so that many sections of the poor people are brought under this Scheme so that they get the benefit of food security.

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: Yes, this particular subject is also before us to take a final view. It is true that we are getting complaints or we are getting suggestions from practically each and every State of the country about the list and the criteria of fixing the BPL list. In fact, there are two-three reports from various experts on who comes exactly under the category of 'BPL'. All these reports of experts are definitely creating a lot of confusion, particularly, to me. It is because one of the experts has said that 82 per cent population of this country comes under the BPL. There are some experts who are saying that it is somewhat near to 32 or 37 per cent. Some say it is 27. Now, the name of Tendulkar Committee has been referred here. We are anxiously waiting its report. We would definitely give a serious thought to whatever they would say. But the approach which was taken till today was not universal. The approach taken was 'Targeted Public Distribution System'. What was the target? The target was essentially poor. We want to protect the interests of the poor and the vulnerable sections, and, that is why practically for more than last ten years, the Government of India is implementing the 'Targeted Public Distribution System'. We are trying to protect the interests of the weaker section or the vulnerable section. Now, if we are going to take a universal approach, then, definitely there will be a huge requirement of foodgrains. One has to see whether the availability of that type of quantity is there. Secondly, there will be a substantial burden of subsidy. One has to assess whether the Government is in a position to take such a huge burden. So, we are in the process of doing all these things.

SHRI K.E. ISMAIL: Sir, in Kerala, the State Government is providing 35 kg of rice for two rupees per kilo. Some other States, like Tamil Nadu, also give rice for one rupee per kilo. More than 26 lakh poor families get the benefit of this programme in Kerala. This is an additional burden for the State Government. Giving rice to the poor is a key factor in ensuring food security. Moreover, it helps to control the price of rice in the open market. So, the Central Government must share the additional burden. Sir, in the concept paper of the proposed Food Security Act, the Government of India has decided that distribution must be restricted to BPL families...*(Interruption)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Question, please. Please, ask the question.

SHRI K.E. ISMAIL: In identified BPL families, there will be no role of the State Governments. According to the Central Government, there are only....*(Interruption)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: What is the question? Please, don't make a speech. Just ask a question.

SHRI K.E. ISMAIL: There are only 10 lakh BPL families in Kerala. This is a gross underestimation of the actual number of BPL families. The Government of Kerala estimates that there are... *(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: I am afraid, I would not allow this question unless you ask your question.

SHRI K.E. ISMAIL: Sir, there are about 20 lakh BPL families in Kerala. My question is whether the Government would provide additional rice at the rate of Rs. 2 per kilo for this purpose?

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: There are some States which have taken certain unilateral decisions and reduced the price of wheat and rice in their States. They have modified the National Policy and taken the financial burden. There are some States which follow Government of India's decision to provide 35 kg foodgrains to BPL and AAY categories, while some other States have unilaterally taken the decision to distribute 20 kg foodgrains uniformly. For instance, Tamil Nadu is not distributing 35 kg of rice. They are taking 35 kg rice from us, but they are not distributing the same; they are providing 20 kg to everybody. So, these decisions are taken by States. Some of the States like Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu have reduced the prices. We have received their proposal in this regard. It is very easy to take a decision to reduce the price and ask for a share from the Government of India. Government of India is already providing substantial subsidy, which is nearly Rs. 37,000 crores, and after implementation of this scheme and taking lot of corrective actions, that burden would come to more than Rs. 50-60000 crores. So, one has to see whether they are capable of taking this kind of a burden. Thus, where unilateral decisions are taken by State Governments to reduce prices, Government of India would not be in a position to accept the suggestion of those State Governments. These are popular decisions taken by State Government. They must have assessed what is the availability in their kitty and taken decisions accordingly. They must implement those decisions with their own resources.

श्री रामदास अग्रवाल: सभापति महोदय, माननीय कृषि मंत्री जी ने अभी उत्तर में दो बातें कहीं। पहला यह कि गवर्नमेंट ऑफ इंडिया का यह बोल्ड डिसीज़न है कि गरीब लोगों को अनाज दो रुपए किलो में दिया जाए। सभापति महोदय, उनका जो यह बोल्ड डिसीज़न है, वह मुझे बहुत कोल्ड लग रहा है क्योंकि उन्होंने जवाब में यह कहा..(व्यवधान).. मैं प्रश्न पूछ रहा हूं। मैं यह पूछना चाहता हूं कि यह जो निर्णय होने वाला है, एक्ट बनने वाला है, क्या इसके लिए आपने कोई समय सीमा तय की है? यदि आपने इसके लिए कोई समय सीमा तय नहीं की है तो वे लोग, जिनको आपसे दो रुपए, तीन रुपए किलो में अनाज की उम्मीद थी, वे कब तक इसका इंतजार करेंगे और कब तक भूख से पीड़ित रहेंगे? इस संबंध में कोई निर्णय आप इसी सेशन में लेने वाले हैं या अगले सेशन में लेने वाले हैं या फिर उसके भी बाद में निर्णय लेंगे? इसके अलावा उन्होंने एक बात और कही है।

श्री सभापति: आप सवाल पूछ लीजिए।

श्री रामदास अग्रवाल: सर, मैंने एक क्वेश्चन पूछ लिया है। यह जो निर्णय हुआ है, इस संबंध में कानून पास करने के लिए क्या कोई समय सीमा तय कर रहे हैं या फिर इसको कोल्ड स्टोरेज में डालकर, इंटरनेट पर देकर, स्टेंडिंग कमेटीज़ में देकर टालते रहने का विचार कर रहे हैं? दूसरा..(व्यवधान)..

MR. CHAIRMAN: No arguments please. केवल प्रश्न करिए।

श्री रामदास अग्रवाल: एक प्रश्न मैंने पूछ लिया है। पार्ट-। पूछ लिया है। दूसरा उनका उत्तर था कि जितनी भी सब्सिडी आप देने वाले हैं।

श्री सभापति: अग्रवाल जी, केवल एक सवाल करिए। Only one question, please.

श्री रामदास अग्रवाल: सभापति महोदय, उन्होंने कहा है कि जितनी सब्सिडी देंगे उसका इंपेक्ट कितना होगा? मैं जानना चाहता हूं कि सारी सब्सिडीज जितनी अब तक दी गई हैं उन सारी को मिलाकर इस ऐक्ट में कितने रुपए का इंपेक्ट पड़ेगा, यह आप बताने की कृपा करेंगे?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would request the hon. Minister to reply to one question only.

श्री शरद पवार : जहां तक सब्सिडी का बर्डन कितना पड़ेगा, यह बात हम बी0पी0एल0 की लिस्ट पर तय करें। बी0पी0एल0 की लिस्ट किस क्राइटेरिया पर होगी इसके ऊपर, क्योंकि आपका जो क्राइटेरिया एक्सेप्ट हुआ है और प्लानिंग कमीशन की सलाह के मुताबिक सदन में बार-बार इस बारे में डिस्कसन भी हुआ है The total number of BPL card holders are 6,52,00,000 or 6,54,00,000. स्टेट गवर्नमेंट जिन्होंने एक्च्युअली एलोकेशन किया है या बी0पी0एल0 कार्ड डिस्ट्रिब्यूट किए हैं, वे 12 करोड़ से ऊपर हैं और इसलिए बड़ी समस्या है। इसमें एक बार बात साफ हो जाएगी कि इतना नम्बर - एक, इतना क्वांटम् - दो, और यह प्राइस - तीन, फिर सब्सिडी का बर्डन कितना पड़ेगा, इसके अंदर आएगा, मगर हमें यह लगता है कि पचास हजार से ऊपर सब्सिडी का बर्डन जाएगा...(व्यवधान)

श्री रामदास अग्रवाल : मेरे प्रथम प्रश्न का उत्तर नहीं आया।

श्री शरद पवार : सभापति महोदय ने एक के लिए ही कहा था।

श्री अवतार सिंह करीमपुरी : सभापति महोदय, बहुत ही अफसोस की बात है कि हमारे देश की सरकार अभी तक कंफ्यूज्ड है कि हमारे देश में गरीब कितने हैं। यह हमारे लिए बहुत ही दुखदायी विषय है। लेकिन कल हाउस जो आर्थिक सर्वेक्षण पेश हुआ है, उसमें सरकार ने माना है कि 77 प्रतिशत पीपुल इस देश में बीस रुपए से कम में गुजारा करते हैं। हम आपके माध्यम से आदरणीय मंत्री जी से जानना चाहेंगे कि जब सरकार अपने आर्थिक सर्वेक्षण में यह मान रही है कि 77 परसेंट पीपुल लैस दैन ट्वेंटी रुपीज में अपना जीवन बसर कर रहे हैं, तो क्या यह जो स्कीम है उन 77 परसेंट लोगों के लिए लागू करेंगे और करनी चाहिए?

श्री शरद पवार : यह सभी इश्यूज अभी तक अनरिजोल्व्ड हैं, इस बारे में कुछ तय नहीं हुआ है। मगर मैंने सदन के सामने साफ बात कही है कि प्लानिंग कमीशन ने हमें जो फिगर दी है इस फिगर के मुताबिक 6.5 crores are total number of families which are below the poverty line that includes AAY also. On that basis, we are accepting and implementing the scheme as on today.

SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT: Sir, so far as the food security and the legislation for food security is concerned, the apprehension is that those at present, who are beneficiaries of the present Government schemes are going to be excluded further. I have had occasion to read the letters sent to all Food Secretaries in the first week of June by the Food Ministry in which a

suggestion is made that the entire allocation for APL section is going to be cut in the name of this Food Security law. Who are the APL sections? Anybody who is earning more than Rs.11.80 a day in rural India is considered APL. Already there is 73 per cent cut in allocations for them. Food security according to the definition of FAO is "required food for all sections at all times." Do you consider a person earning only Rs.15 a month eligible for food security under your proposed Act? If so, will you consider immediately restoring the allocations that you have cut for the APL sections?

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: Whatever allocations the Government of India is making for the APL category today, that will continue. We have neither reduced nor cancelled that. It is true that one particular note has been circulated from the Food Ministry to the various State Governments and that is the basis for discussion. It is not Government of India's final view. That is in the form of suggestion and a basis for discussion. Let the State Governments give their views. We have received views from some States. We are not thinking of reducing the allocation. Hon. President made an announcement that the Government proposes to enact new law, that is, the National Food Security Act, which will provide a statutory basic framework which would assure food security for all. So, the word is 'for all'. 'For all' means there are certain people whose financial position is comparatively different, that is, on the high side. So, whether we should provide similar subsidy as we are providing to the vulnerable sections. So, these issues are there for discussion and we will take a final view about that. But, we are not going to take a view where the APL will not be able to get anything. It is not the thinking of the Government at all. Definitely, we have to protect the interests of that section also.

Insurance scheme for agricultural products

*23. SHRI RAMA CHANDRA KHUNTIA: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state whether Government is considering to declare each village as a unit for the purpose of agricultural insurance compensation and extend coverage of insurance scheme to all agricultural products in all States?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) which is in operation since rabi 1999-2000, is an 'area' based scheme. The implementing States/UTs can notify any contiguous area including 'village' as unit of insurance under the scheme, subject to the condition that States/ UTs have pass yield data and the capacity to undertake requisite number of Crop Cutting Experiments to make assessment of yield.

The scheme is available to all the States/UTs on voluntary basis *i.e.* States/UTs are free to opt in favour of the scheme. Till date, 27 States/UTs are implementing the scheme. The scheme envisages coverage of all food crops (cereals, millets and pulses), oilseeds and annual